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Producers have grants available

By MELANIE THOMAS

Glasgow Daily Times

GLASGOW — More than \$19 million in grants are available to independent agricultural producers nationwide to enter into value-added activities, the United States Department of Agriculture announced earlier this week.

Producers can use the money for conversion to organic production, processing of raw commodities or creating renewable energy sources.

Value-added agricultural product market development grants, or value-added producer grants, are available to help agriculture producers develop business plans to produce biobased products from agricultural commodities.

The deadline for applying is May 16 at midnight.

"Today's ag economy is definitely changing and the landscapes of our operations are changing," said Kevin Lyons, Monroe County Ag Extension Agent. "It's important that farmers can find their own niche and be successful."

This grant could help farmers start their enterprise, he said.

"There are other options available instead of the traditional enterprises," Lyons said. "This can point them in another direction and gives them some incentives to give it a try."

Awards may be made for planning activities or for working capital expense, but not for both. The maximum amounts for a planning grant is \$100,000 and \$300,000 for a working capital grant. Applicants must match funds at least equal to the amount of the grant requested.

"You can't just form a business and hope for the best," Larry Snell, executive director of Kentucky Center for Agricultural and Rural Development said. "You have to develop a clear, concise business plan ... a road plan."

The grants may be used for planning activities, such as feasibility studies, marketing and business plans to establish a viable value-added marketing opportunity for a product.

Applicants must be an independent producer, agriculture producer group, farmer or rancher cooperative or a majority-controlled producer-based business.

Farmers are trying new crops, such as raising goats and growing grapes, to make up for lost tobacco revenue, said Jeff Jones, USDA program director for rural business cooperative service.

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"Instead of making mistakes and killing the business early ... we help them develop a comprehensive business plan from the get go," Snell said.

The grant could help producers "cut out the middle man" by providing help with planning and executing the business plan, he said.

Where to get them:

Application guides are available at
<http://rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/coops/vadg.htm>

or contact Dean Tandy at 859-884-7435.



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